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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 YEREVAN 001359

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [TU](#) [IR](#) [AM](#)  
SUBJECT: PM STAFF GIVE AND TAKE ON TURKEY, ELECTION  
CLIMATE, RADIO LIBERTY, OSCE, AND IRAN

REF: A. A) STATE 155764

[1](#)B. B) YEREVAN 1353

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Classified By: CDA Joseph Pennington, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: A/DCM had a long and fruitful conversation with two of PM Sargsian's close advisers. The two men affirmed the PM's desire to start a process to reconcile with Turkey, even before he become president. They agreed that a string of recent events against pro-opposition figures damage the GOAM's reputation, though contend that the tax authorities' actions are merited on substance. On Radio Liberty, the PM's senior advisor said that the USG had no idea how irresponsibly one-sided and hostile RL's Armenian-language programming had become, but promised to speak with the presidential chief of staff about easing off on RL. The two strongly affirmed Armenia's intention to have a robust OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission for the February election. They took in an abbreviated version of ref A Iran points with little comment, except to insist that Armenian has no intention to help Iran export its gas on to Georgia or wider Europe. END SUMMARY

2.(C) A GOOD SIT-DOWN: A/DCM met the Prime Minister's Senior Advisor (de facto chief of staff and also son-in-law) Mikayel "Misha" Minasyan and staff assistant Levon Martirosyan for 90 minutes of casual conversation over drinks at a local bar. This was A/DCM's first opportunity to meet Minasyan, who apparently has only recently gotten involved in public life. (See bio notes below).

[1](#)3. (C) TURKEY RELATIONS: A/DCM explained that we had heard from Embassy Ankara that there are significant players at senior levels of the GOT who were ready to engage with Armenia about changing the relationship. Our Embassy Ankara colleagues and the GOT wanted to know if the PM is receptive to working on this between now and Armenia's presidential election. Both advisers affirmed that PM Sargsian is serious about his wish to normalize relations with Turkey. They cautioned that the president, not the prime minister, has full constitutional authority over foreign relations, which limited the PM's freedom of action somewhat. On the assumption that the PM will be elected president, however, the PM sees no reason not to start a discussion process with the GOT between now and his mid-April elevation to the presidency. Minasyan was also concerned that whoever reaches out to Armenia from the Turkish side be empowered to speak for senior GOT officials. Armenia had had experiences in the past, Minasyan said, when it entered a dialogue with

individuals from the Turkish government, only to discover later that the interlocutor had no real mandate or support from the higher levels of his own government. Minsyan stated, however, that if the U.S. were to vouch for a GOT interlocutor's credibility, that would be acceptable.

14. (C) MORE TURKEY: A/DCM pointed out that Ankara and Yerevan each find statements emanating from the other capital provocative. He said that Embassy Ankara was going to ask GOT leaders to try to refrain, and it would be welcome if Armenia could do likewise. A/DCM commented that FM Oskanian's letter to Speaker Pelosi -- though mild for Yerevan sensibilities -- had enraged GOT leaders and fed a Turkish conviction that the GOAM is actively promoting "genocide" resolutions in Washington and around the world. The PM aides did not comment. The discussion turned briefly to other ideas to improve Armenia-Turkish ties. Martirosyan proposed a joint Armenian-Turkish website to provide consumer and business information to Armenians seeking to invest in Turkey or vice versa. A/DCM replied that idea fit closely with other concepts we had recently brainstormed with Embassy Ankara colleagues, and could perhaps merit U.S. funding assistance. Minasyan at one point noted the high volume of Turkish-Armenian trade that passes through Georgia as evidence of the pent up demand for normal relations, if political problems can be resolved.

15. (C) ELECTION CLIMATE: A/DCM observed that a string of recent events (e.g. authorities crackdown on Gala TV, the aggressive tax investigations of pro-Levon Ter-Petrosian businessman Khachatur Sukaisian, the detention of pro-LTP journalists and activists while leafleting for the former president's political rallies) created a serious appearance problem for the Armenian government. While we do not know all the details, the timing of all these actions, taken together, would be seen negatively in Washington and in European capitals. Minasyan took the point and said he agreed fully. He commented at some length about the shady character of Sukiasian's business enterprises and alleged

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double dealings going back years. A/DCM commented that Sukiasian had been doing business for many years, presumably in the same way, without any problem from the authorities. Why was it suddenly necessary to put his enterprises under a microscope within days of Sukiasian's overt political support for the opposition presidential candidate? Minasyan said he agreed that it was problematic.

16. (C) RADIO LIBERTY: A/DCM raised the issue of presidential chief of staff Armen Gevorgian's threats against Radio Liberty (Ref B), and said that action against Radio Liberty would be taken as a serious black mark against Armenia's democratic commitment. Minasyan replied "This is the first thing you've said I really disagree with." He likened Radio Liberty's Armenia Service to a child whose parents let him run wild in the streets and had completely lost track of what he was getting up to. Minasyan contended that Radio Liberty's Armenia Service was run by a small clique of Armenians -- led by LTP's old and close friend Hrair (Harry) Tamrazian -- who were inveterate LTP boosters and slanderers of the Armenian government. He said that Radio Liberty's American editors and managers, lacking Armenian language proficiency, must have no idea what is being transmitted in the Armenian language broadcasts. He claimed, for example, one broadcast had insultingly called President Kocharian a "Turk." Minasyan said that the president is rightfully outraged at such insults, as well as the unremitting adulation for LTP that is broadcast daily over Armenian airwaves, with the imprimatur of the United States Government behind it. All of that said, Minasyan closed with two promises: 1) that the prime minister will have nothing to do with any effort to oppose Radio Liberty, and 2) that he, Minasyan, would speak to Armen Gevorgian in an attempt to lighten Gevorgian's stance.

¶7. (C) OSCE/ODIHR: A/DCM stated that Washington officials were troubled by Armenia's support for Russia's stance against OSCE/ODIHR in Vienna and by Russia's recalcitrance with ODIHR's efforts to mount an election observation mission for the Russian Duma elections next month. Washington sought reassurance that Armenia was not planning a similar course. The two advisers strongly affirmed that the GOAM had absolutely such intention, and is planning to host a full-fledged ODIHR observer mission for the February election. A/DCM clarified that this included a timely invitation to ODIHR, a needs assessment mission, full-length Long-Term Observer (LTO) presence, and everything that goes into a normal ODIHR observation. He was reassured on every point. The two men commented that every major international observer group would be welcome, including OSCE, Council of Europe, CIS, and European Union. Neither man seemed even aware of Russia's recent tactics, though Martirosyan had heard that Russia would limit ODIHR to 70 observers. A/DCM predicted that ODIHR would again want something like 300 short-term observers as had been done in May, with perhaps a 30-person long-term cadre for a number of weeks before that. Both advisers thought would be fine.

¶8. (C) GLASNOST AT THE CENTRAL ELECTION COMMISSION?: A/DCM noted the U.S. Embassy had been frustrated in the May elections that the Central Election Commission had refused to accredit our Embassy officers as observers (outside of the limited OSCE quota) beyond one accreditation for the Chief of Mission. This was part of a pattern of inexplicable reluctance from the CEC to provide the sort of "nothing-to-hide" openness that we would like to have, to be able to affirm whole-heartedly that the elections are free and fair.

¶9. (C) THE IRAN POINTS: A/DCM stated that the CDA had an appointment the next day with the Foreign Minister to deliver, on instructions from Washington, our objections to the state of Armenia's Iran relationship. He offered an abbreviated gist of Ref A talking points, highlighting that the timing of President Ahmadinejad's visit and YSU-bestowed honors were objectionable in the current international political climate. He also emphasized that any initiative to help Iran export its energy resources beyond Armenia to Georgia or other third-country destinations would be a huge red flag for the United States. Both men dismissed the idea of reexporting Iranian gas onward, insisting that the pipeline would go no further than the thermal plant near Yerevan. They joked that Yerevan State University gives an honorary degree to almost any foreigner that shows up.

¶10. (C) BIO NOTES -- MIKAYEL MINASYAN: Minasyan was relaxed, self-assured, easygoing (though with an edge that sometimes showed through), and fairly fluent (roughly 3-plus) in

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English, although he periodically sought Martirosyan's help to fill in the odd word or phrase. Perceiving A/DCM's interest, he spent some five minutes enthusiastically showing off the features of his new Apple iPhone, which he had managed to get unlocked to work on an Armenian network. He looked to be in his early thirties. He has a PhD degree, but did not mention in what subject or from what institution. Minasyan referred to having lived a number of years outside Armenia, without specifying where, but apparently visited the United States for the first time on a business trip within the past year. In one telling instance, Minasyan related the tale of his experience applying for a U.S. visa at this embassy about a year ago, when he was running the popular Jazzve chain of coffee houses found all over Yerevan. Minasyan called the experience "hilarious," but it clearly had rankled him. He was in fact granted a visa, though he considered some of the staff peremptory and condescending. He showed some sympathy for the challenges of a vice consul, however, commenting that of the "nineteen" other visa applicants whose interviews he observed while waiting, he would himself have refused them all.

